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THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE

By ELLSWORTH HUNTINGTON

Political Future

The future of Palestine is one of the world's important problems for two chief reasons. The first is the position of the country in respect to India and the British Empire; the second is its historic interest as the Holy Land of Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism.

IMPORTANCE OF PALESTINE AS A LINK IN THE ROUTE TO INDIA

To realize the importance of the position of Palestine take a map of Eurasia (Fig. 1). Remember that India is the key to the British Empire. Without that country Britain would still be great, and the self-governing dominions would still be loyal, but the *Empire* would be broken. The Russians have known this ever since the spurious will of Peter the Great urged the people of the North to expand across southwestern Asia and cut off England. The Germans knew it, and if they could have fastened their grip on Turkey and Persia, or even on Siberia and Russian Turkestan, their next step would have been to strike at India across Afghanistan. The British knew it, and the aim of their most far-seeing statesmen has always been to obtain control of the quickest possible route to India in addition to the longer, slower sea route.

The shortest and quickest route from Britain to India, provided the proper railway lines were built, lies via the Germanic regions of Central Europe to the Balkans and Constantinople; thence, via the Bagdad Railway, to the Persian Gulf; and then through Persia and along the coast of the Indian Ocean to the mouth of the Indus River. That route can never be England's main reliance because of the presence of Germany and Austria in the heart of Europe.

The next quickest route runs via the Baltic Sea to Russia, thence by rail to Baku and its oil wells, and across the Caspian Sea to Transcaspia. There the Russian railroad now ends, at the northwestern corner of Afghanistan, but the distance to the new line from India to Seistan and eastern Persia is only about 300 miles and is rapidly being lessened. This Russian route is quick and easy, but, like the one through Central Europe, it passes through foreign territory, so that England cannot rely on it in times of stress. Thus if England would have a pathway to India all her own, she must still traverse the Mediterranean Sea, as she has done ever since the Suez Canal was built. But is England going to be satisfied with the water route to India? Is it best for the world that she should be so satisfied? Perhaps, but the answer to these questions depends largely on

who rules Palestine. It is one thing to have a feeble power like Turkey with its blunt weapons sitting beside the main highway of the British Empire. It is quite another to have in that place some great power which may at any time whip out a sharp knife and cut that vital highway. It would be suicidal for England to let any but its closest friends assume power so close to the line on which the life of the British Empire depends.

THE REAL BRIDGE BETWEEN EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA

There is another reason why Palestine is of supreme importance to England. In these days of readjustment the British Empire seems to be taking another of those inevitable steps which have caused the country most capable of colonial administration to have the greatest colonial empire. It is for the good of all concerned that this last step should be consummated. Look at the map once more. In the days when sailing vessels went around the Cape of Good Hope, English merchants established themselves first at Bombay and then, about in 1740, at Calcutta near the mouth of the sacred and dirty Ganges. There the British Empire really began. The merchants were seeking pounds, shillings, and pence. They found war, fame, and empire. In spite of themselves they were forced either to retire or to rule. They chose to rule, for they were men of energy and strength. Little by little during three centuries their rule expanded. Eastward it spread only to Burma, for the Burmese mountains blocked the way. Northward the Himalayas interposed a still greater barrier. Hence the British advanced westward. There was no definite plan for such growth at first. Like the Roman and American empires, the British Empire expanded because when strong meet weak, the strong are bound to dominate. That is why we took Texas, California, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Panama. That is why England overran not only India, but Baluchistan, and then peacefully penetrated Persia, and has now conquered Mesopotamia. Because of this same inevitable law of nature England peacefully fell heir to Egypt, while recently in the midst of bloody battles she has been the power that logically invaded Palestine. No matter what may be the final terms of peace in other respects, England is almost certain to retain her hold on Mesopotamia. In British hands Mesopotamia is almost sure to become another Egypt, a fertile home for the overcrowded population of India. When the Tigris and Euphrates are well harnessed, and when the wandering Arabs and the poor Persians and the hosts of India begin to pour into the newly irrigated lands, there will soon be a population of several millions busily raising dates, cotton, and many other products.

When that day comes—and it is not far away—we shall see the nearest possible approach to the old conditions when Egypt and Mesopotamia contained the two world powers. Those two rich river valleys will not be powerful, but they will be prosperous, populous, and able to buy and sell. Inevitably there will be much communication between them. Hence

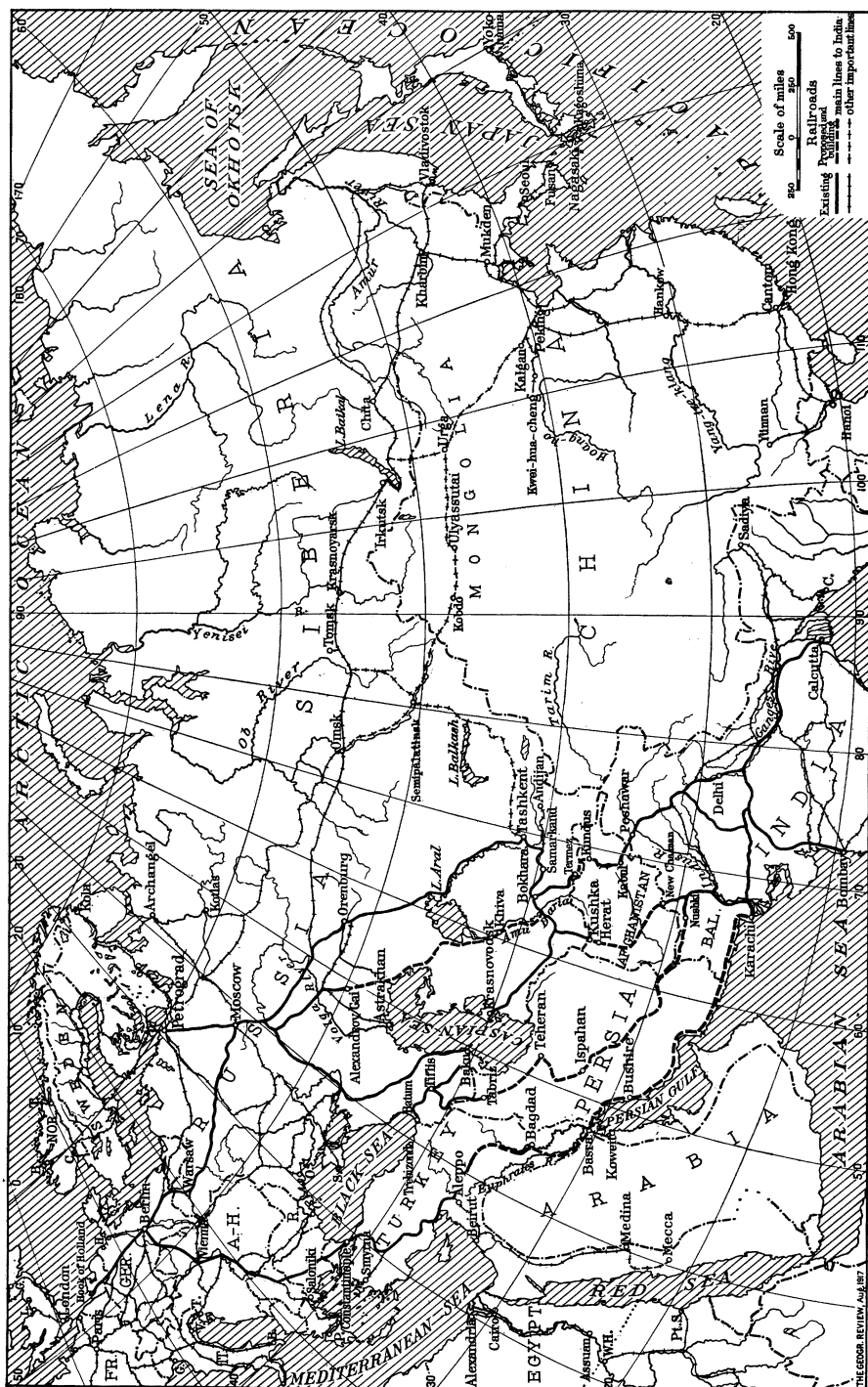


FIG. 1.—Sketch map of Eurasia showing the position of Palestine in relation to the routes between Western Europe and India. Scale, 1:57,000,000. (Reprinted from the August, 1917, *Geogr. Rev.*)

there must be an easy land route as well as a sea route from the Mediterranean to India. The land route may start from almost any point on the east coast of the Mediterranean, and it will certainly have important feeders from Alexandretta in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean and Beirut in the middle of the east coast. Yet its main terminal must be Egypt, where the British power is most firmly grounded.

PALESTINE THE KEY TO THE LAND ROUTE TO INDIA

Between Mesopotamia and Egypt lies Palestine. That is why the Bible is full of the wars of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. That is why the Hebrew patriarchs traversed Palestine between the time when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia and the day when Joseph went down into Egypt and was followed by his brethren. On the map, to be sure, it looks as if the route from Egypt to Mesopotamia might run straight east from Suez through the oasis of Jof to Koweit at the head of the Persian Gulf. Why cannot England be content to build a railroad there, and thus link up the two parts of her empire without disturbing Palestine and the Syrian regions farther north? Such a railroad *might* be built, but there is not one chance in a thousand that it ever will be. In the days of the Roman Empire, to be sure, a caravan route ran this way, starting at the famous rock city of Petra at the southern limit of Palestine, but that was when southwestern Asia enjoyed a more abundant rainfall than at present. Today the entire thousand miles from the Suez Canal straight eastward to the head of the Persian Gulf is almost unmitigated desert which even the Arabs rarely cross. Jof, the only oasis, is nothing but a group of wells. If a railroad were built here it would probably be the most unprofitable road ever constructed. Aside from Jof it would pass through not a city, not a town, not a real village, and not even a good field or orchard for a distance as great as from Boston to St. Louis.

ROUTE FOR A RAILROAD

The only feasible route for a railroad between Egypt and the eastern parts of the British Empire is what we call the Nile-Jordan-Euphrates route. From the Suez Canal this follows the coastal plain as far as Mount Carmel in Palestine. There it turns inland along the plain of Esdraelon, crosses the Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee, and proceeds northward across the plains of Hauran to Damascus. Thence the route coincides with the present Mecca railroad as far north as Aleppo, where it joins the Bagdad railway, which will ultimately follow the Tigris from Mosul and ancient Nineveh to Bagdad and the Persian Gulf. Before many years, however, another railroad will probably be built northeastward across the desert from Damascus. It will pass through the stately ruins of Palmyra in the desert and farther east go down the Euphrates to Basra, the river port

for ocean steam ships. Such a road would be only about 300 miles longer than the direct route across the main desert through Jof. It would be commercially profitable, for it would run most of the way through territory that is already populated, or that is capable of supporting a considerable population as soon as it is irrigated. Such a railroad with its continuation in southern Persia would unite the British Empire much more firmly than any other method that seems within the bounds of possibility. It is desirable for every reason. Not only must England have it for the sake of her Empire, but the regions through which it will pass need it to establish the *pax Britannica* after their long nightmare at the hands of Arab, Turk, and Persian.

If such a railroad is to become a reality, and if the British sea route to India is to be safe from a flank attack, Great Britain must have control of Palestine and of the part of Syria east of the Anti-Lebanon and including Damascus.

FRENCH CLAIMS

Will the other nations consent to such an arrangement? France is traditionally the guardian of the Christians of the East. For many years she has exercised a sort of protectorate over Syria. Today she apparently expects that this protectorate will be enlarged and confirmed. Her expectations are justifiable. Nevertheless it would be well for the world if she would relinquish whatever claim she has to Palestine and the part of Syria east of the mountains. In return Britain may well make large concessions in other regions. Divided authority, however, is always bad, and it would be well for all concerned if one great power could have a free hand in Syria, and also in the Armenian regions whence flow the waters that will redeem Mesopotamia. Britain is logically the country to control this region. Already she has Mesopotamia, and it will greatly hamper the progress of the whole Turkish Empire if she cannot control the highlands to the north and east and the approaches from the west.

AMERICAN ATTITUDE

As to our own attitude toward the future of Palestine, the wisest course seems to be to support Great Britain as far as possible, but also to urge that France be fully compensated elsewhere. Perhaps the difficulty of harmonizing conflicting interests may lead to some sort of joint control in which the United States may have a share. Possibly a semi-independent Zionist state will be organized under the guarantee of a League of Nations, with England, France, and the United States as chief sponsors. England might well consent to such an arrangement if the railroad were left in her control and there were no possibility that Palestine would become a military base for some other power. Whatever may be the final solution we must take our share of responsibility for seeing that it is fair to all concerned. Our philanthropists, our educators, and our missionaries have

done far more for Syria and other parts of the Turkish Empire than have the people of any other nation. We have done our best to inspire them with the love of freedom and with aspirations for progress. We cannot leave them in the lurch until we know that they are safely under the guardianship of some wise, strong power like Great Britain.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CALIPHATE

There is another reason why England should have control of Palestine and the neighboring regions, especially Arabia. It is well known that a Holy War, that is a war of Moslems against Christians, is always a possibility in the East. The Caliph, or head of the Moslem world, has a strong influence with Moslems in all countries. Formerly the Sultan of Turkey was the supreme Caliph. During the Great War, however, many Moslems thought that he had become the vassal of the Kaiser and was no longer to be obeyed. This idea, which was rightly fostered by the Allies, led to a rebellion on the part of the Sherif of Mecca, who claimed to be Caliph even while Turkish garrisons still held out in Medina and another small town. Odd as it may seem, these garrisons appear to have lived for a year or two on friendly terms with the people with whom they were supposed to be fighting. If the Moslem world is to be kept contented it appears necessary that there should be a Caliph whose authority is widely accepted. England rules far more Moslems than any other country. Therefore she is the natural protector of the Caliph. If she had Palestine, this, with Egypt, southern Arabia, and the Persian Gulf, would round out her Moslem possessions in this region, would enable her to encircle him and at the same time leave the Caliph a small semi-independent territory including Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities of the Moslems. England has had long experience in dealing with vassals of this sort. For the peace and happiness of the world it seems eminently wise that there should be no further chance for some irresponsible and uncontrolled potentate like the Sultan to have the power and prestige that undeniably go with the Caliphate.

Economic and Social Future

So much for the political future of Palestine. What of her economic and social future? Let us consider the possibilities of this little land which is so familiar in name but so unfamiliar in real essence. Can it ever again become a land flowing with milk and honey? Suppose that it is turned over to the Zionists, will its own citizens ever be able to maintain a strong, progressive government able to support itself and improve its people through its own initiative? These questions need careful handling lest we fall into the rosy errors of the enthusiasts on one side and the black despondency of the pessimists on the other. There is no denying that Palestine is greatly handicapped both by its physical conditions and by

the quality of its present inhabitants. Yet the case is by no means hopeless. Egypt is a most encouraging example of what can be done when a strong and benevolent European government undertakes to improve a forlorn country of the Orient. Palestine can never attain the agricultural wealth of Egypt, but in other ways it can far surpass that country.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Let us examine the resources and possibilities of Palestine. So far as natural wealth is concerned the Holy Land is decidedly poor. It has no minerals, forests, or fisheries worth mentioning. It has a little water power in the Jordan River between the lakes of Huleh and Galilee, but there is not the slightest reason to believe that manufacturing can ever become an industry of much importance. Neither can there be any great development of commerce, for there is not a single good harbor on the whole coast. Much commerce may pass through the country when the Nile-Euphrates railway is completed, but this will have little effect on Palestine. Does this sound discouraging? It is not so bad as it sounds. Almost the same might be said of many of our greatest states such as Nebraska. Agriculture is the world's great resource, and many a region such as Nebraska is prosperous simply because it has fine agricultural possibilities and energetic people.

THE SOIL

In Palestine agriculture once reached a high level. It does so today in spots. It might do so in many more spots. The soil is almost everywhere highly fertile, for it is largely the residue formed by the decay of limestone, or of dark, rich lavas. Few sights are more inspiring than the wonderful, level wheat fields in the basaltic soil of the Hauran east of the Sea of Galilee, or the orange groves of the Jewish colonies around Jaffa. Unfortunately the soil is very thin in many regions, especially in the highlands of Judea and Galilee, where the climate is most bracing. Formerly this was not the case. In the days of Jesus Christ and earlier there is reason to think that all except the steeper slopes were well clothed with rich soil. It has disappeared because of the change of climate which is now generally agreed to have taken place. A diminution of rainfall, especially during certain especially dry times such as the seventh century of our era, apparently made agriculture difficult. This led to the neglect of ordinary farming and to increased reliance on sheep. At the same time the constantly recurring droughts seem to have killed the trees and bushes and to have diminished the number of smaller plants. Thus during the long rainless summers the feet of the sheep and goats, as they tramped over the hillsides, broke up the soil and made it loose. When the rains came in the fall, they washed away the soil in great quantities, leaving thousands upon thousands of acres of bare rock. Many a landscape in

Judea is half bare rock. Here and there, to be sure, lie pockets of fine soil, but at present most of them are unused.

RAINFALL AND TEMPERATURE

Aside from the scarcity of soil the chief handicap of agriculture in Palestine is the lack of rain in summer. From October or November to April or May there is usually plenty of rain—as much as in the eastern United States. The rest of the year there is practically none. Hence the peasants must either raise crops such as winter wheat and barley that are ready to reap by June or July and drought-resistant trees like the olive, or else they must practice irrigation. On the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon and in the Jordan Valley irrigation is possible and will doubtless be developed on a considerable scale under the new régime after the war. It is also locally possible in a great many places where small cisterns and reservoirs can be constructed. Nevertheless it can scarcely be the main reliance of the country. The places where it is possible are too limited in area. Moreover the places where it is possible on a large scale are low, hot, and unhealthy. In the Jordan Valley the noon temperature averages 100° F. for six months in the year and over 75° F. the cooler six months. On the plains near the seacoast one swelters day after day in summer and loses all one's energy. One of the few regrets of my four months in Palestine is that the July heat made me so lazy that I gave up climbing Mount Carmel, a trip that I had planned for months. If I had climbed I know that I should have felt much more energetic, for the highlands are far better than the lowlands. Of course they are hot in summer and when the south wind blows from the desert people simply wilt away. Yet much of the time the summer heat is not trying, and the winters are quite bracing. Unfortunately, however, the places that are best for man are just the ones where the soil is thinnest and the possibilities of irrigation least.

DRY YEARS

In spite of these difficulties Palestine might derive much profit from agriculture if only there were some provision to tide over the dry years. Such dry years come at irregular intervals and are the great bane of the peasants. In 1909 I saw thousands of acres of wheat and barley into which the sheep and camels had been turned for pasture because there was nothing to reap. In other years those same fields yield wonderful crops. In the same way the olive crop is often very fine, but some years it fails. Many of the rockiest hillsides as well as thousands upon thousands of acres elsewhere might profitably be planted with olive trees. In this way the whole aspect of the country might be changed. There is no possibility of increasing the rainfall by this means as some people have supposed, but what water there is would be prevented from draining away so fast, and the soil would have more chance to accumulate.

POSSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENT AID

One of the great needs of agriculture in Palestine is a strong and benevolent government. Under the Turkish régime there was a tax on each olive tree. When the tree yielded a poor crop for a year or two, the thriftless peasants often cut them down in order to avoid paying the tax. Under the new régime the government must encourage the planting of trees. Not only should it remit the taxes in years of drought, but it should make some provision for compulsory insurance. Part of the yield of oil might be stored and then sold in bad years for the benefit of the peasants. There is always a good market for olive oil. The great necessity is some means whereby the good years can be made to feed the bad. The same is true in respect to grain. Simply because the climatic extremes are far greater in a subtropical land like Palestine than in a land of storms at all seasons such as the eastern United States there is far more need of paternalism on the part of the government. If the wonderfully rich soil of Palestine is to be utilized in the years of good rainfall, some kind of state insurance is needed to tide over the bad years. Also there is great need of some provision for work on public improvements or otherwise during the dry years when the average farmer in Palestine sits around and does nothing most of the time. England has taken important steps toward solving this problem in India, but it is far easier of solution in Palestine.

TOURIST TRAVEL

One reason why the agricultural problem is relatively easy of solution in Palestine is that this is the Holy Land. Not only religiously, but economically the Bible is a great asset. When Palestine is finally under the enlightened rule of one of the great powers, the tide of tourists and pilgrims will increase enormously. In fact it seems highly probable that a considerable proportion of the inhabitants will be engaged in one way or another in caring for the wants of the travelers. This, however, can never be a substitute for agriculture. There are today about half a million people in Palestine, and there will doubtless be many more before long. Ordinarily only a small part of these will be needed to take care of tourists. In Switzerland I believe that only five per cent of the population take care of the sightseers. Nevertheless the agricultural deficiencies in Palestine can be greatly alleviated by a judicious handling of the tourist problem. In bad years a wise government could easily lower the prices of board, transportation, guides and the like. Private companies might even find this profitable, since they would be able to hire men and horses at lower rates than usual. By judicious use of advertising and by varying the rates of transportation from other countries there is no doubt that the government and the companies together could cause the tide of tourists and pilgrims to ebb and flow so that many of the people of Palestine would find employment in years of poor crops, while relatively few would be so occupied when all hands

were needed to harvest the heavy crops of wheat and barley that often gladden the eye on the hills of the Holy Land. Such a plan is indeed paternalistic, but paternalism seems to be necessary in dealing with backward countries.

NEED OF GOOD ROADS

If agriculture and tourist travel are to succeed in Palestine one of the first necessities is a widespread improvement of the roads. Today one can almost count the good wagon roads on one's fingers. One road winds along the crest of the plateau northward from Hebron through Jerusalem and Nablus, or ancient Samaria, to Nazareth and the north. Another leads from Jaffa up to Jerusalem, and a third along the coastal plain from Jaffa northward. Usually, however, the roads are merely trails. In the villages the man who picks up a stone in his vineyard often throws it into the street—if street is the right word for a mass of small, loose, limestone boulders. Elsewhere the trails are execrable. In eight years of travel I have never traversed any trails worse than two leading down into the Jordan Valley. On one occasion one of my horses slipped on the stones and fell eight or ten feet, landing on his back. The other time a baggage horse, utterly weary from a long steep descent, slipped on the rocks, and became so tightly wedged between two boulders that we could scarcely get him out even when his load was taken off. Even in the settled parts the trails are usually so bad that wheeled vehicles are out of the question. In many places the poor little donkeys stumble and fall so badly that it scarcely pays to load them, and one sees the people carrying home their grain and straw on their own heads. Of course conditions are better in the plains, but even there good roads are almost unknown.

Such roads, or rather such lack of roads, inevitably retard civilization. When the crops are plentiful it is extremely difficult to take them to market and sell them at a profit. When the crops are poor, it is equally expensive to bring food from a distance. Thus poverty is engendered, and poverty means ignorance and ill health. Moreover, there is no doubt that travel is one of the best means of enlightenment, but no one wants to travel over such roads. Many people have never been beyond their own little market town. In the Jordan Valley I met an Arab sheikh who said he had never been to Jerusalem, although it was only 16 miles away and he had often seen it. In the future one of the great advances in Palestine is almost sure to come through the building of roads. If easy roads and good mountain trails are everywhere available, travelers from foreign lands will visit hundreds of out-of-the-way places which now are rarely seen.

SCENIC ATTRACTIONS

From my own experience I can say that in all my travels I have never seen any region of equal size which rivals Palestine in variety of scenery and unique interest. Not only are there holy places to be visited, Bible

scenes to be recalled with wonderful interest and distinctness, and a new type of life to be seen, but there is most striking scenery. Go along the east coast of the Dead Sea from one end of the lake to the other, and you see something that probably cannot be paralleled elsewhere. The red cliffs with wild palms growing on their tops, the weird hot springs, the narrow cleft where the Arnon breaks through the wild crags, the strange banded platforms of the Lisan—all these and many other scenes make the voyage down the Dead Sea one of the most striking events in the career of any traveler. Or to go to Petra and wander among the white cliffs and caves, the red temples and gorges, and the banded red, yellow, blue and gray pinnacles of the "high places" on the mountain tops. If something quieter is desired, visit Jerash with its Roman ruins and its picturesque Circassians, and pass on to the oaks of Gilead, where one must dodge the branches or die like Absalom, and where the people still live in caves. Good roads and trails will indeed spoil these places for the people who love adventure, but they will make them accessible to thousands who now stay away because of the hardships.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL INERTIA

Good government, an assured system of agriculture, and good roads will by no means make Palestine a paradise. Hard work and poverty will still be the lot of the majority of the people. Schools and other kinds of instruction will do much, new immigration may add a more progressive element. Yet still there will remain in Palestine the half million backward people who are now there, and their almost equally backward children. But will their children be so backward? The answer is found in places like Egypt. The children are not quite so backward as their fathers, but the change is slow. I do not know whether the present natives of Palestine have good minds or bad. I do know that something aside from bad government is responsible for their backwardness. Of course the Turkish government has done its best to make Palestine a desert. Yet even the government can scarcely be held responsible for the man who for years bends down to take hold of a plough handle only a foot above the ground. He might easily splice a new piece of wood onto the old one, but he is too inert. If this man were alone, he might not matter, but his action is typical of thousands, or perhaps hundreds of thousands.

We cannot yet say with certainty that it is ill health that causes such seeming stupidity. Yet there are strong grounds to think that this is the case. In our own country we are fast discovering that an appalling amount of seeming stupidity is due to anaemia or other minor ailments. A child who is deaf or near-sighted is called stupid; one whose feet are wrongly shaped is called a coward because he does not like to play ball. In Germany, even before the war, over 20 per cent of the school children suffered from anaemia due to malnutrition, poor teeth, and various other causes. In a country like Palestine most of the people must be suffering more or

less in this way. Of course we have no figures; we can merely judge by the way in which the parents sit with open mouths while the children stand around doing nothing instead of playing. Part of the trouble comes from the lack of variety in the climate. While the winters are fairly good, there is altogether too little variability from day to day. Hence people lack the stimulus which comes from constant change. Part of the trouble is due to insufficient food, which is the common lot of a large part of the population for years at a time. Also the food is too uniform. Bread and a little cheese day after day is all that many get. Another part, however, and probably a large part, is due to mild but protracted diseases which almost escape notice.

We might go on to amplify the lack of physical vigor, and hence the lack of mental achievement. How much these have to do with the backwardness of the present people of Palestine and of Turkey as a whole we cannot tell. Certainly this matter of physical vigor is so important that it should receive the first attention of any power that wishes to raise Palestine to its former high plane. That plane, it will be remembered, was apparently attained when the climate was more variable and when the general food supply was less precarious than now. If the Zionists make an earnest attempt to rehabilitate Palestine, they can do the world no greater service than to determine exactly what it is which makes the people of countries like Palestine so anaemic and inert. If these qualities can be overcome, we may expect Palestine to advance rapidly. If they cannot, the best that can be done is to furnish a good government, improve the roads, prevent famine, and raise the people as high as is possible for people who lack energy.